

# Jewish Americans who attend synagogue enjoy better health, study finds

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For Jewish Americans, going to synagogue makes a difference for health, according to a study of five large Jewish urban communities by Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion.

"Adults who affiliate with a Jewish religious denomination and attend

synagogue report significantly better [health](#) than secular or non-practicing Jews," says Jeff Levin, Ph.D., University Professor of Epidemiology and Population Health, professor of medical humanities and director of the Program on Religion and Population Health at the institute (ISR).

Data from the five community surveys confirm what studies among Christians have shown for many years—that people with a strong sense of religious identity and who participate in their faith seem to do better, on average, than people without an active spiritual life, Levin said.

Levin's study, which used data collected throughout the 2000s as part of Jewish community surveys from Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and two surveys in New York, was published in January's *Journal of Religion and Health*.

"While there have been hundreds of studies of physical and [mental health](#) among Christians and members of other faiths, Jewish studies have been limited mostly to Israelis and to smaller clinical samples in the U.S. or the United Kingdom," Levin said. "These new results are provocative because they are based on sophisticated surveys of more than 5,000 Jewish adults living in four of the largest Jewish population centers in the United States."

Affiliated Jews of every denomination—whether Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist or Reform—reported better health than secular, non-affiliated Jews. Likewise, Jews who attended synagogue, at all, whether regularly or less frequently, reported better health than those who never went.

For Levin, an important next step would be to mount a national health survey of the Jewish population. "This would provide an opportunity to dig a lot deeper than what's possible using data from existing community

surveys, which weren't really designed to assess health," Levin noted. "It's fortunate that a question or two on health was included in these surveys, but we can do a lot better."

A sophisticated national survey also could serve as a needs assessment that would provide valuable information for Jewish organizations seeking to address the health and life needs of American Jews, Levin said.

Provided by Baylor University

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